

# New Year's resolutions for the Peninsula homeowner

by Doug Newbould

As if Y2K could get any stranger—the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge experienced a 15,000 acre wildfire last week! I don't know about you, but I am glad to see the year 2000 in my rear-view mirror. From a firefighter's perspective, it was the worst year I've ever experienced, and I don't want to see its re-enactment in 2001 either. Looking back, a useful motto last January might have been, "Expect the unexpected in 2000." As a firefighter and fire manager, I have made that motto my creed: "Always expect the unexpected." And I can say truthfully, it has served me well throughout my firefighting career.

As a homeowner here in Alaska, I know there are many practical things I can and should do to prepare my home and property for the next natural or man-caused disaster—be it wildfire, earthquake or volcanic eruption. We can mitigate or reduce the impacts of disasters, improve our survivability, and decrease the time and resources needed to recover from a catastrophic event if we plan ahead for the unexpected.

So here are some practical New Year's resolutions for the Peninsula homeowner:

- I will install, replace and/or inspect my smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors, fire extinguishers and home sprinkler system.
- I will clean my chimney or stovepipe at least twice this year.
- I will review and practice fire escape and earthquake plans with my family.
- I will prepare/inspect survival kits in my home and vehicles.
- I will strap the water heater and tall furniture/appliances to the walls, install safety latches on the cabinets and make sure the house is properly anchored to its foundation.
- I will install 'safety shield' window film on my windows and keep a supply of plastic and plywood to cover windows that break out.

- I will create a defensible space around my house and outbuildings.
- I will install a visible address sign at my house and make sure the local street signs are clearly labeled.
- I will make sure emergency vehicles can use my driveway and can turn around safely.
- I will establish an emergency water supply for power outages.
- I will retrofit/remodel the exterior of my home with fire-resistant materials.
- I will get to know my neighbors and talk with them about disaster mitigation and preparedness.

This list of resolutions might be more than a person or family could handle in one year, depending on their current level of preparedness, their financial resources and their level of commitment. And this is not meant to be a complete list. I'm sure you can think of other things you can do to prepare for the unexpected. Whatever you do, try not to be intimidated by this list. Many of these resolutions can be accomplished without a lot of effort or expense. You know there is only one way to eat an elephant—one bite at a time.

If you would like more information about disaster mitigation measures for your home, contact the Kenai Peninsula Borough's Office of Emergency Management, your local fire department or me. Let's expect the unexpected and make ourselves ready. 2001—Here We Come!

*Doug Newbould is the Fire Management Officer at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. He is currently serving on two Kenai Peninsula Borough Project Impact committees and is a member of the Kenai Peninsula Fire Chiefs Association. For more information about the Refuge, visit the headquarters on Ski Hill Road in Soldotna, call 262-7021 or see the website at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.*